

United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Aviation Safety Alert

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Subject: Pilot Duty Day Limitations

Area of Concern: Aviation Operations

Distribution: USFS Aviation Operations

Discussion: There has been confusion in the language of the Forest Service Handbook definition of a duty day for pilots and the intent of the language.

FSH 5709.16 11.27a – Flight and Duty Limitations for All Flight Crew Members – Phase I, Paragraph 1. (b) states: “A duty day is defined as any day a flight is made or any day in which 4 hours or more of duty are performed.”

The intent of this passage is to define a duty day during the designated pilot workweek and shall not to be applied to the mandatory pilot rest day(s). It is important to remember that any duty of any length or paid flight performed during the mandatory rest period violates the work rest regulations for pilots and results in additional days off for the employee. Actions that invalidate the mandatory rest period, that is either 24 or 48 hours of uninterrupted rest, and would require an additional day off include the pilot returning to the airport to work on their aircraft, or consult on maintenance work, complete paperwork, or utilize office services.

Additionally, time spent in official transportation status to report at the beginning of a new workweek for flight duties shall not be performed during the mandatory rest period. Time spent in official transportation to a point where the employee begins their mandatory rest period is also considered duty.

It is also important to remember that by Federal Aviation Regulations and Interagency Policy pilots are required to have 10 hours of uninterrupted rest after being released from duty during their mandatory stand-by period. Interruptions, such as phone calls regarding upcoming dispatches or the pilot returning to the work site (airport or office) constitutes a break in the rest period and the pilot is required to restart the 10-hour rest period. **Example:** Pilot’s duty day ends at 2200 hours. That pilot is not available for duty until 0800 the following day and cannot be interrupted during the 10 hours of rest.

With the intensity of the fire season managers should make every effort to ensure that all agency and contract pilots receive their complete mandatory rest periods without interruption.

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